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ABSTRACT

If the path to a better rural life is to be a change preferred by the rural people involved, recent world experience would suggest that it must be a change born from within the given rural social system, be controlled by its beneficiaries, and be integrated into the larger system of which it is a part. Such a perspective and such a process might be labeled "rural renaissance", for as perspective, it gives priority to the view of the farming family, and as process, it draws initiative and energy from that same family. Rural renaissance, then, may be defined as the marriage between traditional patterns (values, norms, technologies, and behavior) and those innovative patterns which result in the birth of change. Since values and beliefs vary from one social system to another, interaction between a rural renaissance stimulation system (outsiders) and a rural renaissance acquisition system (insiders) should facilitate positive change, if consideration is given by both outsiders and insiders to questions of appropriate organization, doctrine, leadership, programs, resources, and linkage systems. The larger rural renaissance stimulation system, then, would be a world wide network of interacting people who are able to learn from each other in the universal quest for improvement of the human condition. (JC)

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RURAL RENAISSANCE -- A PERSPECTIVE AND A PROCESS*

By

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*Prepared for presentation to the Third International Conference of East-West Communication Institute on Integrated Communication for Rural Development, December 2-6, 1974, Honolulu.

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RURAL RENAISSANCE -- A PERSPECTIVE AND A PROCESS

By
George H. Axinn

The concern of this paper is the rural people of Africa, Asia, and Latin America -- the men, women, and children who till the soil and tend the livestock.

The search for a higher "quality of life" among these rural people is informed by recent world frustration in the field of rural development.

Analysis of experience with such efforts as the Comilla projects in Bangladesh, the Animation Rurale in Senegal, the CADU project in Ethiopia, the Joint Commission for Rural Reconstruction in Taiwan, the Servicios of Latin America, the Panchayati Raj of India, recent approaches in Tanzania and in the People's Republic of China, and other efforts of the past few decades suggests that perhaps rural development can not be delivered from outside.[1]

If the path to a better life be change which is preferred by rural people to their present situation, then recent world experience suggests that it must be born from within any particular rural social system, controlled by its beneficiaries, and integrated into the larger system of which it is a part. This path may be labeled Rural Renaissance.

Rural renaissance is a perspective and a process. As a perspective, it gives priority to the view from the farming family on the land. As a process, it draws initiative and energy from that same rural family.

Rural Social Systems

Human groups which live in rural places, and which tend to be small groups in relative isolation from each other and from larger groups, may be labeled as rural social systems. These systems (See Loomis)[2] may be described and analyzed according to their functional components, as in Figure 1. A typical rural social system is characterized here as having eight functional components, related to each other through a linkage infrastructure, and all set into a social, political, economic, religious, cultural and physical environment.[3]

The production component may be subdivided into agricultural production and other production. Agricultural production involves land, labor, capital, technology, etc., and other production involves manufacturing, agro-industries, including labor, capital, technology, etc. Then there is a supply side for both of these production components. The supply function, for agricultural production, includes seed, feed fertilizer, credit, and other inputs. The marketing function includes transportation, storage, processing, retailing, etc.

The governance function has to do with the regulation of life, and includes administration, revenue, law and order, etc. The education function involves both formal and non-formal instruction of various individuals by others, and also the informal education which is not contrived, but through which people learn most of what they have to know.

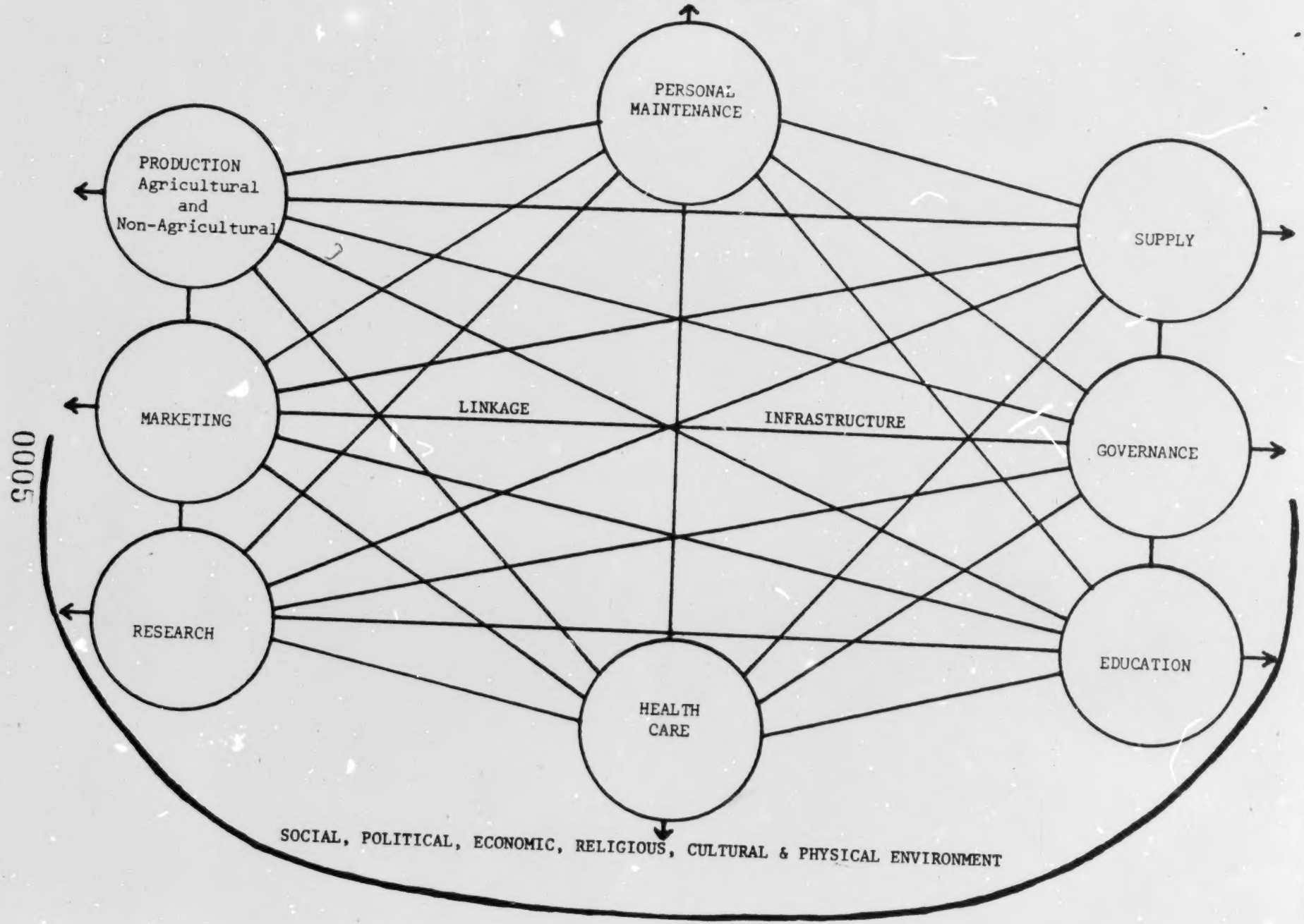
The research function, like education, includes formal, non-formal and informal aspects.

The health care function has to do with the various ways in which the social system prevents injury and disease, and attempts to cure these maladies when they arise.

FIGURE I

THE RURAL SOCIAL SYSTEM IN ITS ENVIRONMENT

Functional Components



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The personal maintenance component is a function of every human group, and includes such activities as cleaning, grooming, and clothing the body, rest and recreation, and a variety of other sub-functions in which each individual must invest time and energy each day.

Each of these eight functional components is related to the others through an infrastructure of linkages which includes, roads, waterways, (including drainage, irrigation, and potable water) communication, power systems, etc. Further, these functions, and the linkage infra-structure which connects them and relates them to the outside world, are always in a social/political/economic/cultural/religious/physical context, which sets the pace and the style of all of the actions of the separate components and the interactions between them.

Like any other system, a change in any one component, or in any linkage affects all of the other components and linkages. Resistance to change in any one component or linkage is a constraint on change for any other component.

The Development Cycle

A major weakness in the traditional approaches to development has been lack of rigorous useable definitions.[4] Such synonyms as modernization, industrialization, and urbanization cloud the scene. Economic and level-of-living indicators tended to reflect external developer values, and show the "less developed" societies continuously falling further behind the "more developed."

An alternative view of the world attempts to resist the definition of development which rests on the value system of the assessor. It is based on the concept of a development cycle.

Assuming that it is possible for humanity to come into some sort of equilibirum state with its environment, then it is conceivable that:

A. Human groups which are under-utilizing the resources of their eco-system in enhancing their own levels and styles of living may be considered to be underdeveloped.

B. Human groups which are over-utilizing the resources of their eco-system in enhancing their own levels and styles of living may be considered to be overdeveloped.

C. Human groups which are in equilibrium with the resources of their eco-system, with respect to their own levels and styles of living, may be considered to be appropriately developed.

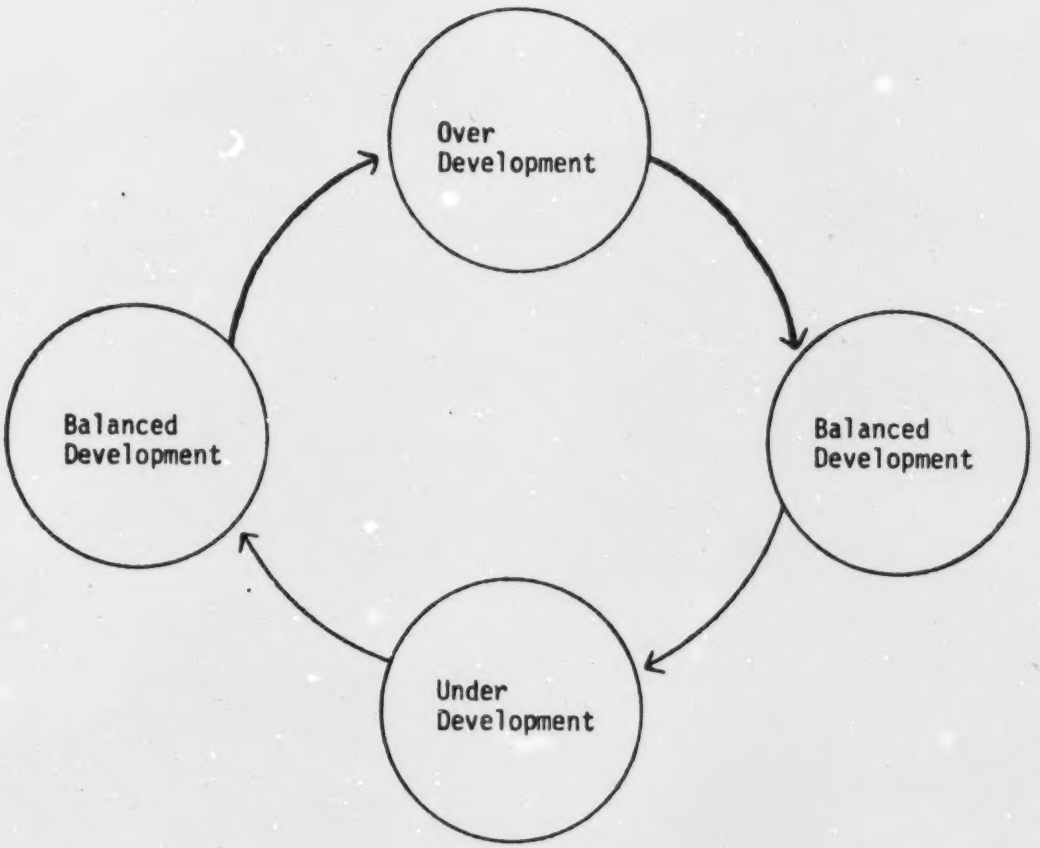
Viewed from a time perspective, each human group may move through cycles of underdevelopment, balanced development, overdevelopment, balanced development, underdevelopment, etc. This phenomenon may be labeled "The Development Cycle." The rate of change varies from group to group, with some apparently static and others moving quite rapidly. A given group may also go through periods of rapid change, periods of very gradual change, and periods when change may not be apparent at all. See Figure 2.

One way to assess the relative balance of a particular human group with its environment is in terms of its utilization of energy.[5] That is, if a group is utilizing relatively little energy (petroleum, electricity, sunlight and heat, wood, etc.) per capita in enhancing its own level and style of living, then it may be considered to underdeveloped. If a group is using relatively high amounts of energy in enhancing its own levels and styles of living, then it may be considered to be overdeveloped. And if a group has balanced its utilization of energy with its level and style of life, it may be considered to be appropriately developed.

If this rationale be sound, then the ratio of energy consumption to population of each group would have an optimum (associated with appropriate development) and a range between extinction of the group and destruction

Figure 2

THE DEVELOPMENT CYCLE



of its environment.

Energy consumption, while complex and elusive, is relatively easy to measure. Styles of living tend to defy measurement. Separating the level from the style may be helpful. Perhaps style can be described, and thus identified, while level can be measured. This would lead to descriptors of life style and indicators of levels of living related to levels of energy consumption. The indicators tend to be quantitative while the descriptors tend to be qualitative. Indicators of such factors as production, consumption, and levels of health can be studied from a different perspective than descriptors of such factors as style of dance and form of religious worship.

Development could also be measured in terms of specialization of human performance of functions. Given that these several functions are performed in every rural social system, a progression may move from systems where one individual performs all functions for himself--to a stage where members of a family specialize in specific functions--to a stage where different families might draw major sustenance from fewer functions, increasing their dependency on other families for other functions.

The possibility that human groups may over-specialize as they become over-developed, and then broaden functions to less specialization, may be consistent with the concept of a development cycle.

The opportunity costs of specialization, from an economic perspective, include deprivation from holistic involvement with essential components of life. Just as the over-specialized worker on a "modern" production line may long to own his own tools and make a "whole car," the buyer and shipper of rice might long for the closeness to nature of the paddy.

Nevertheless, simple systems where one component carries on many functions, move in the direction of complexity, with specialized components. The more specialized the components, the more inter-dependent they are with each

other. And this phenomena informs one of the critical issues in contemporary attempts at rural development.

When rural social systems are relatively simple, they can function effectively independent of each other and independent of urban centers. But as they develop increased specialization of components, they become more and more dependent upon each other, and upon the central cities. Thus, rural social systems can change in the direction of complexity up to a point without significant integration with each other and the urban centers. Beyond that point, if they are not integrated with the total society, their development stagnates.

With respect to change, it can be assumed that at any given time each human group experiences forces in the direction of particular changes; forces in the direction of stability; and forces in the direction of particular counter changes. Each change itself may be characterized by a level of inertia. (See Merton; Rogers.)[6]

Rural Renaissance

Rural renaissance may be a more useful concept than rural development... both for those who are trying to assist from outside, and for those suffering excessive misery within contemporary rural society.

Renaissance refers to a new birth or revival. To go through renaissance is to go through "a period of vigorous artistic and intellectual activity."[7]

From this perspective, renaissance may be defined as a marriage of traditional values, norms, behavior patterns, and technology with innovative values, norms technology and behavior patterns, resulting in the birth of changed behavior patterns, technology, norms and values. With this conceptualization, rural renaissance cannot be delivered from outside. It is not something that can be injected, like an antibiotic, into an infected person. It has to be born from within any particular social system. In that sense, it is indigenous--it is the child of its older parent.

Although the focus of this paper is on rural social systems, the concept of renaissance is by no means limited to rural societies. The debate over the meaning of the word "rural" is at least as vigorous and represents as much disarray as the debate over the word "development." In some contemporary social systems the concept of rural and urban may be obsolete. For much of the world, however, rural areas can be identified through their lack of communication and transportation facilities, the disbursement of people on the land, and the relatively small size of their villages.

Those who live in or near small villages which tend to be isolated from each other in terms of both communication and transportation can be defined, for our purposes at least, as being rural.

Thus, rural renaissance emerges as a basis for the rationale of inter-system interaction at many levels--international, rural/urban, between agencies and organizations like Ministries of Government or universities, and the rural people whom they serve.

Criteria For Assessing Rural Renaissance

In order to get at the issues involved in development, a variety of indicators have been suggested. These are attributes of the system which tend to be valued. Thus, characteristics such as the levels of income (usually cash income) per capita; production per capita; type of housing; type of clothing worn; distance between the kitchen and the source of water supply; numbers of miles of paved road per capita; average lifespan; percentage of infant mortality; the proportion of school-age persons who are enrolled in the formal educational system; percentage of functional literacy; kilowatt hours of electric consumption per capita; and many, many more have been utilized.[8]

Attempts to develop a universal pattern of such criteria for all of humanity have not succeeded. Since the values and beliefs systems differ

from place to place, notions of what is desirable in life also differ.

The present state of every situation has its highly valued aspects.

On some aspects of human misery, however, there seems to be consensus. The slow death of an infant, caused by hunger and a variety of minor parasites and infections is sheer human misery. No one likes to be cold, or hungry, or in pain. Sweltering, back-breaking work, under a hot sun, is sweltering, back-breaking work!

Yet, replacement of two hundred human beings who are carrying concrete in their head-pans by an electric elevator is not recommended. Those two hundred people need their jobs. Tractors which similarly replace farm laborers are also rejected. "Never take away another man's rice bowl." But misery management, suggested elsewhere by the writer, is not enough.[9]

Dr. Inayatullah of ACDA, one of the most insightful scholars in the field, has both defined rural development and has specified six indicators of it:

> "Rural development is a process which leads to a rise in the capacity of rural people to control their environment, accompanied by wider distribution of benefits resulting from such a control. An increase in the capacity to control environments as well as an increase in access to benefits could be reflected in the following six indicators:
>
> 1) changes in rural productivity, reflected in per acre hectare yield;
> 2) changes in the extent of employment, under-employment, unemployment, etc.;
> 3) changes in the distribution of income and wealth;
> 4) changes in the power structure reflected in change in the extent of influence of rural people on the local and national decision-making process;
> 5) changes in the degree of mobility in the local class structure reflected in allocation of position of prestige, status and power on the basis of achievement or ascription;
> 6) changes in the values, beliefs and attitudes favorable to the control of larger environments. Relevant favorable/unfavorable value changes may include fatalism/self-reliance, traditional/experimentalism, optimism/pessimism, etc."[10]

Although merely surviving is difficult on the alternatively parched and flooded plains of Bengal, and in the tropical rainforests of West Africa, or on crowded Java--the air is clean, and life has its joys and its serenity. Attributes which are highly valued in one society, may not be valued very highly in another.

But if rural renaissance implies a rebirth to an end-state which is preferred by the participants over the present state, then some system of measurement, and thus definition, may be necessary. It might include a way of assessing the pattern of values of the related attributes of the members of the rural social system, the kinds of goals and objectives they may set with respect to such a pattern of attributes, and then the extent of change between beginning states and ending states.

Since some of the attributes may vary inversely with each other over time, renaissance involves a thorough mixing of the old and the new in order to stimulate the very birth of the more ideal.

More useful, perhaps, would be utilization of the phenomena involved in the Development Cycle. Measurement of per-capita energy use, when compared with the capacity of a given eco-system, could provide an index of under-development, balanced development, and over-development. Similarly, measurement of the extent of personal specialization in carrying out the social system functions, could provide another index of under-development, balanced-development, and over-development. Some type of rationalization of these two indexes of indicators, perhaps modified by descriptors of other aspects of life style, might provide empirical tools for scholarly research.

Stimulation of Rural Renaissance

From the beginning, it is recognized that rural renaissance cannot be delivered from outside. Outsiders who cannot deliver rural renaissance,

however, may be able to help stimulate it. Insiders who cannot merely buy rural renaissance... or gain it as recipients from an outside donor agency, can organize to systematically interact with the outsiders. The insiders can become a rural renaissance acquisition system.

In considering change in a rural society, several questions can be asked with respect to a rural renaissance acquisition system. For example:

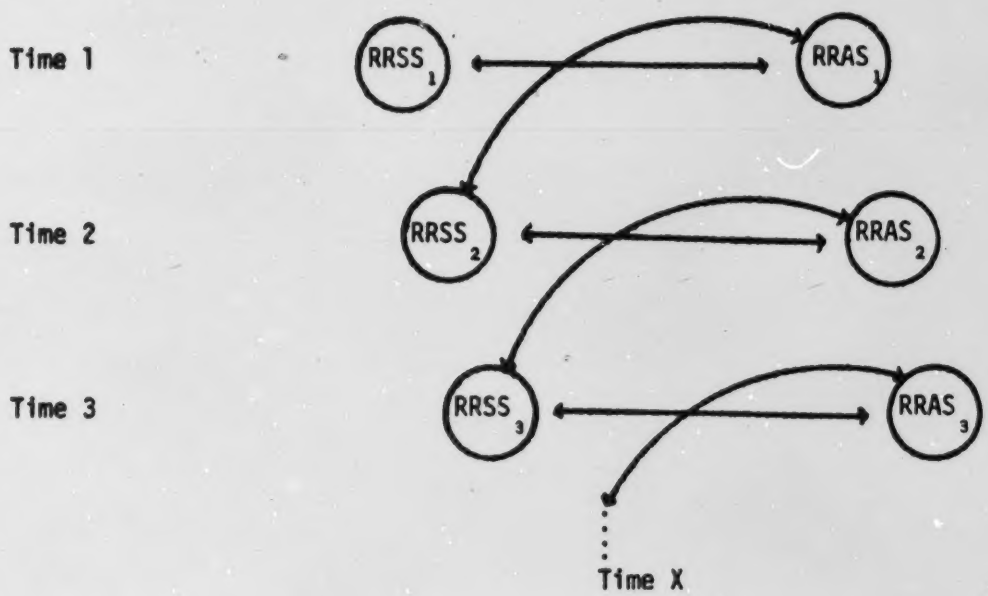
1. What kind of organization(s) would be appropriate for system-actically receiving the stimulation and permitting the gestation of rural renaissance?
2. What kind of doctrine would be appropriate for such a system?
3. What kind of leadership would be necessary for such a system?
4. What kind of programs would such a system develop?
   a. What kind of goals would these programs have?
   b. What kind of means would be used to achieve these goals?
   c. What kind of participation would be involved in these means?
   d. What kind of timing would be involved in such programs?
5. What kind of resources would such a system require...acquire...?
6. What kinds of linkages would a rural renaissance acquisition system need to develop and maintain and utilize with what kinds of outside systems?[11]

Iterative Reciprocity for Rural Renaissance

Similar questions might be asked of any grouping of outsiders whose goal might be to stimulate rural renaissance. In the design of a rural renaissance stimulation system, consideration is also appropriate with respect to questions of organization, doctrine, leadership, program, and resources.

FIGURE 3

Iterative Reciprocity
between a
Rural Renaissance Acquisition System (RRAS)
and a
Rural Renaissance Stimulation System (RRSS)



As for its operations, the world experience does offer some guidance.

For example, the stimulation system may have to be redesigned for each particular acquisition system. Linkages between the stimulation system and the acquisition system must provide for "two-way" communication.

The acquisition system will influence the stimulation system just as the stimulation system influences the acquisition system.

Such a stimulation system may be an individual or a group; it may be merely a group of people with an idea, or it could be an agency of government or a private corporation.

For example, when Economics Professor Sam Aluko, of the University of Ife, returns to his family's village on a weekend, he is a Rural Renaissance Stimulation System. He brings ideas, innovations... sometimes money... but mostly stimulation. The village is changing. Its citizens testify that it is improving rapidly. It is experiencing a renaissance!

Some of the villages in Comilla Thana in Bangledesh have experienced a similar renaissance. For them, the Thana Training and Development Center,[12] with model farmers and cooperative managers from their own villages, has served as a Rural Renaissance Stimulation System.

The frequency of interaction between the stimulation system and the acquisition system will be related to the success of the total effort. For each transaction, however, there will be costs and benefits both for acquisition system and for the stimulation system. See Figure 3.

Professor Herbert R. Kötter of F.A.O. suggests an important aspect of the strategy, as follows:

> "To get a clearer notion of what integrated rural development really means we have to distinguish two aspects:
>
> a) The situation of the rural poor can only be improved if they are integrated into the overall system. That means that the society as a whole must develop a better awareness of

the problem and create a more favorable political climate. General development policies must be formulated in such a way as to take into account basically the rural poverty problem even if this could involve for instance, a lower growth of the G.N.P....

b) Integrated rural development means a 'package programme.' It has to take into account the interrelationships of socio-political, economic and technical factors in a systems approach. There is a general notion of this necessity. However, a lot of research has still to be done to make the concept operational, e.g. to develop the general principles and to apply them in a given situation. One major obstacle is the difficulty to quantify certain elements and to measure socio-economic development."[13]

The phenomenon of a series of interactions in which both systems change over time, has been described elsewhere by the author as iterative reciprocity.[14] Through iterative reciprocity between rural renaissance acquisition systems and rural renaissance stimulation systems, changed behavior patterns, technology, norms and values, can be born.

From the perspective of outsiders who would intervene on behalf of insiders and attempt to stimulate rural renaissance, the measure of iterative reciprocity itself may be the most appropriate criterion for evaluation of the renaissance.

The more interactions between the rural renaissance stimulation system and the rural renaissance acquisition system, the greater the chance of renaissance. For each interaction, the greater the benefits and the smaller the costs for each system, the better. As time goes by, the stimulation system will become more like the acquisition system, and the acquisition system will become more like the stimulation system--to the benefit of all.

Regarding the rural renaissance stimulation system, to the extent that its values, norms, technology and behavior patterns are no different from those of the rural renaissance acquisition system, it is not likely to stimulate

significant renaissance. It must be more than a reflection of the acquisition system. This suggests that the rural renaissance stimulation system might benefit from linkages with the world experience in rural renaissance and in rural development. To the extent that the stimulation system can be aware of the solutions to problems of land ownership and rural class in the People's Republic of China; the work on rural administration in India; the land development and productivity schemes of Malawi; and alternative solutions to such problems as rural credit and marketing, the building of rural roads, productivity, governance, research, and education... to that extent, its transactions with the rural renaissance system can be fruitful.

Thus, the larger rural renaissance stimulation system must be a world-wide network of interacting agencies, organizations, and individuals who are able to learn from each other in the universal quest for improvement of the human condition.

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Footnotes

1. For a review of relevant literature, see, as examples, Edgar Owens & Robert Shaw, Development Reconsidered, Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath & Co., 1972; UN-ECA, Integrated Approach to Rural Development, Social Welfare Service in Africa, No. 8 (July 1971) New York; Max F. Millikan & David Hapgood, No Easy Harvest, Canada: Little, Brown & Co. Ltd., 1967; Josef Pajeska, "Social Dimension of Development." In The Case for Development, New York, Washington, London: Praeger Publishers, 1973, by UN Centre for Economic and Social Information; George H. Azinn and Sudhaker Thorat, Modernizing World Agriculture: A Comparative Study of Extension Education Systems, New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1972; and E. B. Rice, Extension in the Andes, AID Evaluation Paper No. 3, U.S. Agency for International Development, Washington, D.C., April 1971.

2. Charles P. Loomis, Social Systems: Essays on their Persistence and Change, D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc., Princeton, New Jersey, 1960.

3. Axinn & Thorat, Op. Cit., Chapter 1.

4. Recently, the Economic Commission for Africa of the United Nations defined rural development as: "The outcome of a series of quantitative and qualitative changes occurring among a given rural population and whose converging effects indicate, in time, a rise in the standard of living favorable changes in the way of life of the people concerned." UN-Economic Commission for Africa, An Integrated Approach to Rural Development, Social Welfare Service in Africa, No. 8 (July 1971), New York, p. 1. The International Economic Association addressed its 1972 annual conference to Agricultural Policy in West Germany, and failed to define rural development. Nural Islam, Ed., Agricultural Policy in Developing Countries, A Halstead Press Book, John Wiley & Sons, New York-Toronto, 1974. The Bendavids, after agonizing over the nature of underdevelopment, and the problems of definition of development in the International Deveopment Review, come out like this: "What is the nature of underdevelopment? There really is no such thing, except as a society, by truly looking inwards, may wish to define it for itself." Avrom Bendavid and Leah Bendavid, "Developed and Underdeveloped: A Radical View of Constructive Relationships," in International Development Review, 1974/1, p. 13.

5. Fred Cottrell, Energy and Society - The Relation Between Energy, Social Change, and Economic Development, McGraw-Hill Book Co. Inc., New York, 1955 (Reprinted 1970 and 1974 by Greenwood Press, Westpoint, Connecticut.)

6. Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure, The Free Press, New York, 1957, and Everett M. Rogers, Modernization Among Peasants - The Impact of Communication, Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc., New York, 1969 (LC69-12453).

7. Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, Springfield: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1971 p. 724. The English word "renaissance" comes from the French renaistre, which translates as "to be born again," which is exactly the sense in which the author uses it here.

8. In addition to the citations in Footnote 1, above, see Adam Curle, Educational Strategy for Developing Societies, Latimer Trent & Co. Ltd. Whitsabe, 1970; Subhash C. Kashyap, "Democracy and Development Interrelationship," in International Development 1969, The Society for International Development, Oceana Publications, Dobbs Ferry, N.Y., 1970, pp. 310-314, and, in the latter publication both B. S. Narula, "Administration for Development," p. 329, and Ernest Gellner, "The Aims and Criteria of Development," p. 51.

9. George H. Axinn, "Misery Management: A Substitute for Development?" in International Development Review, 1972/1, pp. 43-44.

10. Inayatullah, "A Proposed Conceptual Framework for Study of Approaches to Framework for Study of Approaches to Rural Development in Asia," Asian Centre for Development Administration, Kuala Lumpur, mimeograph, August, 1974, pp. 4 and 5.

11. For a discussion of these aspects of any organization, particularly related to its institutionalization, see Melvin G. Blase, Institution Building: A Source Book, Midwest Universities Consortium for International Consortium for International Activities, Inc., East Lansing, 1973. (L.C. 73-78318).

12. Arthur Raper, et al., Rural Development in Action: The Comprehensive Experiment at Comilla, East Pakistan, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1970.

13. Herbert R. Kötter, "Some Deliverations on Basic Principles and General Strategy of Integrated Rural Development," a paper submitted by the Human Resources, Institutions, and Agrarian Reform Division, FAO at the ECE Seminar on the Planning and Development of Rural Areas, Plovdiv, Bulgaria, 3 to 8 June 1974 (HBP/SEM·5/COM·2/Add·1).

14. George H. Axinn, "Institutional Reciprocity is the Answer," in Focus: Technical Cooperation, (in International Development Review), 1973/3, p. 11; and Axinn, et al., Toward a Strategy of International Interaction in Non-Formal Education, Institute for International Studies in Education, Michigan State University, East Lansing, April, 1974 pp. 97-101; and, George H. Axinn, "Getting the Habit -- International Reciprocity," CERES, FAO Review on Development, January/February 1974, pp. 60-62.